

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH URGES YOU TO PROTECT YOUR
CHILDREN DURING CHILD PASSENGER SAFETY WEEK AND
THROUGHOUT THE YEAR**

(Richmond, Va.)—Child Passenger Safety Week, February 13-19, 2005 emphasizes the importance of safely transporting children throughout their childhood. During this week and year round, the Virginia Department of Health's Center for Injury and Violence Prevention is encouraging parents and caregivers to buckle up their children, on every ride, and to educate children about safety in and around vehicles.

"Riding unrestrained is the greatest risk factor for death and injury among child occupants of motor vehicles," said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H. "In Virginia during 2003, 14 children under the age of 14 died and 561 were injured as a result of being unrestrained in a motor vehicle crash. Unfortunately many of these tragedies could have been prevented if children were properly restrained within the motor vehicle."

Despite the efforts of conscientious parents who use child safety seats, many are unaware that they are using the seats incorrectly. Parents can help establish safe patterns of behavior by making sure that children age 12 and under always ride buckled up or in properly installed child safety seats or booster seats in the back seat. Rear-facing seats should never be placed in the front of a motor vehicle equipped with an air bag. It is important for parents to make sure that anyone who transports their child does so properly.

Unfortunately, many parents believe that once their child has outgrown his or her forward-facing child safety seat, the vehicle seat belts offer adequate protection. But, using seat belts alone to secure small children can be dangerous. A shoulder belt designed for an adult can cut across a child's neck and the lap belt can ride up over the stomach, which could cause a serious or fatal injury in a crash. That is why parents should secure children around ages 4-8 years old and under 4-feet 9-inches tall in booster seats. A booster seat positions the lap and shoulder belts correctly, low over the hips and upper thighs and snug over the shoulder.

For more information on child passenger safety, contact the Virginia Department of Health's Center for Injury and Violence Prevention at 1-800-732-8333. You may also visit its child passenger safety Web site at www.safetyseatva.org to learn about safe installation of safety seats, the Virginia child restraint laws or to learn of locations to get your child safety seat or booster seat inspected and installed correctly.

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